2. SERVICE CENTER VISION

USDA has made significant strides since the President signed the Federal Crop Insurance Reform and Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994. This legislation provided USDA with the opportunity to launch a bold plan to reorganize the Department, improve customer service, and save taxpayer money. By focusing on fewer offices, lower employment levels, and administrative process reforms, the plan promised to save money while improving service to customers.

The Service Center Initiative (SCI) is a cornerstone of the overall reorganization and modernization effort of the department, providing leadership for improvements in customer service. The SCI is deeply involved in the full range of modernization initiatives including:

- Reorganizing and streamlining field structure.
- Overseeing administrative convergence of Service Center agencies.
- Integrating technology.
- Ensuring Year 2000 (Y2K) compliance.
- Expanding partnerships.
- Improving outreach to under-served customers with a reduced workforce.

The ultimate objective is to create a Service Center environment where a customer can obtain one-stop shopping and quality customer service. In addition to increasing customer satisfaction, the USDA wants to reduce the cost of providing services and cultivate strong partnerships with various organizations at the Federal, state, and local levels. A complete explanation of the Service Center goals and strategies can be found in the USDA Service Center Strategic Plan. The plan location can be found in the USDA Documentation Roadmap referenced in **Appendix L** of this document.

A description of the Service Center Vision and USDA's view of the Model Service Center follows. It is a futuristic, or "To-Be," look at what composes a Model Service Center. This vision began as a concept described in the USDA Service Center Concept of Operations document produced in 1997 and is slowly becoming reality.

The discussion is divided into the subsequent sections:

2.1 Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

A USDA Service Center is a place of business that provides information on and delivers:

- Farm programs and farm credit for FSA.
- Conservation technical assistance and technical guidance for conservation planning and assistance for NRCS.
- Rural loan and grant programs for Rural Development agencies.

Some or all partner agencies may be represented at each Service Center location. The center must have the necessary automated resources, knowledge, and skills to respond to customer questions and to satisfy their requirements at a basic level for all USDA partner agencies—"one-stop shopping."

The Service Center Vision reflects the views of both USDA customers and senior management of the partner agencies, as well as the Secretary of Agriculture's vision of the department as a "place where our customers are going to know, and want to know, about a broad variety of things" and where "our first responsibility is the effective delivery of our programs to our customers."

Mission

USDA Service Centers, in partnership with individuals and communities, will deliver agricultural, rural development, and natural resource programs efficiently and with a quality of service that exceeds customers' expectations.

This mission encompasses the three partner agencies' individual missions and includes common goals such as cost reduction and quality customer service.

Vision

We will reach out and deliver programs to customers in a manner that is responsive to their needs, treating each with dignity and respect.

USDA's near-term focus during fiscal years 1998 and 1999 included the successful reorganization of the field structure and field office closures, while reducing costs, improving program delivery, and increasing efficiency. USDA's long-term focus through fiscal year 2002 involves increasing operational efficiency by reengineering business processes and implementing common computer applications, data architectures, and computing platforms to facilitate sharing of accurate, timely, and readily accessible information across mission areas.

Thus, the SCI Strategic Vision is directly linked to the USDA and subordinate Mission Area Strategic Plans, and will be guided and measured against a series of goals developed by the partner agencies:

- One-stop service.
- Quality customer service.
- Cost reduction.
- Partnership.

The SCI objectives are closely aligned with the mission area strategies.

2.1.1 SCI Goals and Objectives

General Goal 1—One-Stop Service

Establish one-stop USDA Service Centers where agricultural, rural development, and natural resource conservation programs are provided by employees offering exceptional service seamlessly.

Objective 1: Consolidate current NRCS, FSA, and Rural Development field offices through collocation and closures, and create a new office structure consisting of approximately 2,550 USDA Service Centers in accordance with a strategic location plan that best combines technical requirements and agency customer program management considerations.

Objective 2: Implement a communications strategy and plan that fosters understanding and commitment to Service Center goals and objectives.

Objective 3: Establish one-stop service as the organizational culture by December 31, 1999, through change management.

Objective 4: Develop an integrated source of customer, land, and program information that can be shared within Service Centers and with customers.

Objective 5: Establish an open, integrated information management system in all USDA Service Centers.

Objective 6: Examine current program delivery processes and identify opportunities to streamline and integrate program delivery; develop innovative delivery means that enhance service, reduce cost, and provide the flexibility for changes in direction.

Objective 7: Develop capability for Service Centers to deliver customer benefits for all applicable USDA programs, regardless of the number of partner agencies present.

Through the one-stop service goals, USDA will provide seamless agricultural, rural development, and natural resource conservation programs to customers.

Service Centers will enhance customer service to farmers, ranchers, rural communities, businesses, and families by providing all applicable USDA programs at all locations. Customer convenience will be improved through collocations and the establishment of the Service Centers, because each office will be able to provide services for all applicable USDA programs. Opportunities for greater efficiency will be created through partner agencies' sharing of staff and technology.

In order to deliver/meet the one-stop service objectives defined above, USDA is in the process of implementing the following initiatives:

- Consolidation of current NRCS, FSA and Rural Development field offices.
- Communication that fosters understanding and commitment to customers.
- Integrated source of customer, land, and program information.
- Open and integrated information management systems.
- Delivery of customer benefits for all applicable programs, regardless of the number of partner agencies present.
- Performance measurement of Service Centers to support continuous improvement.

The following chart explains how these initiatives, once complete, will affect Service Center operations from three distinct perspectives: Service Center customers, Service Center employees, and state- and department-level USDA officials.

Initiatives	Impact of One-Stop Service		
	Customer	**Employee**	**USDA/States**
Consolidation of current NRCS, FSA and Rural Development field offices.	• One physical stop. • One trip for several programs from different agencies. • Cross county/state service. • Faster/prompt service. • Cross boundary information. • Reduced paperwork. • Less trips to SC. • Less time per visit. • Increased delivery to under-served areas. • Drive farther but less often.	• Greater efficiency by providing services at the time they were requested. • Higher number of knowledge-workers. • Reduced labor time to deliver programs. • Increased understanding of all USDA services and programs. • Cross-training opportunities. • Higher potential for a single Service Center customer focus.	• Reduced number of Service Centers to be managed. • Maximized resources, reduced cost. • Reduced paperwork. • Sharing administrative resources to the maximum extent possible.
Communication that fosters understanding and commitment to customers.	• Enhanced Partnership. • Multi-media materials to create partnership culture.	• Flexibility for changes. • Improved assessment/understanding of customer and community needs. • Improved outreach by servicing all customer needs during a single visit.	• More consistent USDA communications with customers. • Enhanced partnership. • Reduced paperwork.
Integrated source of customer, land, and program information.	• Real-time information about land, program and account status. • Less time per visit. • Improved planning capability.	• Information sharing among Service Centers and with customers. • Common perspective of customer. • More in-depth and faster customer service.	• Reduced cost of collecting and maintaining only one set of data per customer. • Reduced paperwork. • Cross-boundary information.

Figure 2.1-1. Initiatives and Their Impact (Page 1 of 2)

Initiatives	Impact of One-Stop Service		
	Customer	**Employee**	**USDA/States**
Open and integrated information management systems.	• Help on all application forms (language, content, computer entry). • Real time information about land, program, and account status. • Access to information (to include status on customer accounts) on all USDA programs from any SC regardless of the number of partner agencies present. • Potential access to programs anywhere/anytime (web). • Less time per visit. • Electronic transaction capability. • Faster receipt of benefits. • Reduced paperwork/burden.	• Access to single customer file, land, program, and administration information regardless of agency. • Real time information on land, program and account status. • Single desktop enhancement. • Reduced paper. • Employee access to all program and customer information. • Automated application processing. • Fewer errors. • Simple delivery of training.	• Release time and resources to focus on customer delivery and better customer service. • Reduced cost of collecting and maintaining only one set of data per customer. • Reduced cost of developing and maintaining application systems. • Availability of program information. • Improved decision support information. • Supportable budgets. • More timely workload information. • Greater flexibility to organize to the mission. • Better able to leverage resources to most important issues.
Delivery of customer benefits for all applicable programs, regardless of the number of partner agencies present.	• Access to information from any office, van, kiosk, or tribal land. • Program delivery, including assisting customers in applying for programs, processing to approve or disapprove applications, finalizing agreements, and providing benefits.	• Cross boundary information. • Reduced paperwork. • Fewer trips to customer locations. • Innovative delivery means that enhance service. • Increased support for onsite visits. • Improved customer productivity.	• Availability of program information. • Increased breadth of USDA services delivered by Service Centers. • Increased community partnership.
Performance measurement to support continuous improvement.	• Surveys to provide feedback on programs effectiveness. • Feelings that they can affect their destiny through change.	• Enhanced partnership. • More focused customer interaction.	• Implementations by conducting reviews in selected states and develop initiatives required to facilitate transition to Service Center operations. • Continuous examination of current program delivery processes and identifying opportunities for streamlining and integrating programs delivery. • Better budget justification.

Figure 2.1-1. Initiatives and Their Impact (Page 2 of 2)

General Goal 2—Quality Customer Service

Exceed the expectations of customers by providing fair, equal, courteous, high-quality, professional, and personalized service in a timely and nondiscriminatory manner.

Service Center employees are committed to providing fair and equal treatment to customers without regard to race, color, national origin, age, and disability in all programs and services.

Customer service is a primary consideration and focus of the Service Center. Staff will exceed customer expectations by providing courteous, high-quality, professional, and personalized service in a timely and effective manner.

Service Centers will strive to achieve the following customer service standards:

- Customers are treated with courtesy and respect.
- Customers are given prompt and reliable service.
- Customers are given information that is clear, reliable, and easy to understand.
- Customers are given forms that are easy to understand and complete and, if necessary, given assistance in completing them.
- Customers can expect Service Centers to work with related state and local offices.

Objective 1: Establish a customer-defined, service-quality feedback system so customers have a convenient and trustworthy method to communicate concerns, problems, and recommendations to USDA, and so improvements can be made in response to customer needs.

Objective 2: Increase customer satisfaction with service provided by USDA Service Centers.

Objective 3: Reduce the amount of time a customer needs to devote to receive a USDA benefit.

Objective 4: Meet or exceed customer-defined standards for program delivery.

Objective 5: Improve service by providing remote customer access to all applicable USDA program information and applications.

Objective 6: Examine customer outreach efforts, identify opportunities to improve outreach to under-served areas and nontraditional customers, and integrate improved outreach efforts across all applicable programs.

General Goal 3—Cost Reduction

Reduce administrative and program delivery costs by implementing common processes in support of USDA Service Center operations.

Service Centers will continue to reduce administrative and program delivery costs by using integrated information systems and sharing administrative resources to the maximum extent possible.

Objective 1: Reduce USDA Service Center administrative costs by reengineering administrative processes and functions.

Objective 2: Share agency resources for data entry and exchange to reduce database establishment and maintenance costs.

Objective 3: Reduce the cost of delivering programs by reengineering and developing a set of core business processes that maximize the sharing and integration of partner agency resources.

General Goal 4—Partnership

Develop partnerships with individuals, conservation districts and other organizations, communities, private organizations, and Government agencies to maximize use of limited resources and attain common goals and objectives, while protecting the privacy of our customers.

Service Centers will continue to develop partnerships with individuals, communities, other private organizations, and Government agencies to maximize the use of limited resources and attain common goals and objectives.

Objective 1: Expand ties with state, county, local, and private entities to expand information and services provided through USDA Service Centers.

Objective 2: Provide an integrated source of partner information that can be shared within Service Centers and with customers.

2.1.2 Strategies

USDA is accomplishing the Service Center reengineering incrementally, along with testing and piloting of technology alternatives. USDA has established a set of reengineering implementation strategies focused on attaining the goals first articulated in a Concept of Operations published in 1995 and enhanced by the SCI Strategic Plan developed in 1997 and updated in 1998. These strategies focus on the "back-office" (internal Service Center operations, such as managing customer information within a Service Center) as well as the "front-office" focus of reaching out to the customers and providing service. **Figure 2.1-2** illustrates these strategies.

Figure 2.1-2. Strategies: Collocation—Culture Change—BPR—Consolidated Administrative Procedures—Integrated Technology

2.1.2.1 Service Center Collocation: A First Step in One-Stop Service

Implementation of one-stop service and cost reduction requires partner agencies to move or close stand-alone field offices and migrate to collocated Service Centers. A Service Center is any full-time office that delivers USDA programs and services, regardless of which agencies are located in the office. While the intent is to collocate USDA offices to the maximum extent possible, agency presence within a Service Center is based on customer needs. Thus, all three partners will not necessarily have a full-time presence in all Service Centers. Collocation requires sharing administrative management services and developing appropriate internal controls to share costs. It also enhances cross-agency sharing of personnel to better focus on customer needs, facilitated by sharing customer information within and among Service Centers. The primary purpose of collocation is to provide a single USDA presence, which exists to provide the best possible service in an environment of reduced resources. This goal requires USDA to fundamentally change the way services are delivered at the county level. Customers are not concerned about the structure of USDA offices as long as their needs are satisfied.

The Service Center agencies are streamlining the way they conduct business to eliminate boundaries between agencies by sharing administrative processes and centralizing management of customer information and services. Individual agency signs have been replaced with a new USDA Service Center sign that conveys the integrated service concept. Integrated telephone systems have been installed, and Service Center phone listings have been redesigned to reflect a program rather than an agency orientation. With the focus on customer satisfaction, the Service Center agencies work together to satisfy customer needs. Collocation begins to solidify the infrastructure required to deliver seamless services by sharing administrative functions and critical customer information.

2.1.2.2 Human Side of Change: Employees, Partners, and Customers

From the outset of Service Center implementation, USDA recognized that the human side of change must be a paramount consideration in all deliberations concerning the future business environment. Significant efforts have been made to address the human side of change with respect to customers, employees, partners, and other stakeholders. The SCI Quality Customer Service and Change Management/Training initiatives are important components that ensure concern for the human side of change is at the forefront of all Service Center activities.

In addition to quality customer service and training, USDA has instituted a strong plan to partner with other agencies to meet common customer goals. The partnerships are with other Government and non-Government agencies and associations and help to solidify SCI goals.

Along with increased partnerships, USDA has increased its outreach efforts to both customers and employees. Outreach councils have been established on national and state levels, and SCI is in the process of providing program information to customers and employees

via the Internet. All of these efforts are means to address the human side of change from both an internal departmental perspective and an external customer/partner perspective.

2.1.2.2.1 Quality Customer Service

The SCI has conducted a variety of customer surveys and listening activities to determine the kind of service that customers want, and to ensure that the customer perspective is incorporated into strategic and operational plans for Service Centers. Significant effort has been made to learn how borrowers and producers feel about the USDA service. USDA has been systematically collecting customer service data since 1994, and this base of information has been steadily expanded with additional research to determine methods of service improvement.

2.1.2.2.2 Change Management/ Training

It is important that employees, partners, and customers understand the underlying reasons for and support the significant changes—collocation, business process reengineering, and technology infusion—necessary to implement the Service Center concept. To facilitate that understanding, the SCI Change Management/Training effort focused on the human side of change.

Emphasizing programs and initiatives that cross agency lines—an enormous culture change for the Service Center agencies—the training provides an opportunity for Service Center employees to work together to meet the needs of common customers of three separate agencies. Employees gain the customer service skills they need to put their customers at ease, and our strong commitment to serving all customers with dignity and respect is reinforced. The training uses case studies, developed in conjunction with the Service Center partner agencies' civil rights staff, to illustrate our commitment to civil rights. Internal barriers to working together across agency lines and barriers to providing extraordinary customer service are identified—and barriers that cannot be resolved locally are referred to state and national levels for resolution. In addition, our employees are receiving information technology, Geographic Information System (GIS), and program training to increase their levels of competence and confidence as they reinvent the way Service Centers deliver programs.

Cross-Servicing

As the SCI modernization effort proceeds, USDA will achieve its goal of providing one-stop service to customers through a variety of initiatives, including deploying integrated technology, reengineering program delivery methods, and implementing new policies and procedures. An important step in this process will be to determine the extent to which customer needs will be met at all Service Centers—that is, how one-stop service will be implemented as the modernization effort matures. In this regard, making the most efficient use of resources (staff, facilities, and equipment) is a significant requirement.

Over the next year, the SCI will identify existing opportunities to better meet customer needs through sharing resources across agency lines. Customer survey results that are reported by the Quality Customer Service Team in FY 1999 will be used as a point of departure to update specific service objectives to meet customer needs. Other alternative cross-servicing concepts will be identified in conjunction with current BPR pilot testing and Reinvention Lab (see Section 4, page 4-10) activities. Based on updated customer service objectives, the SCI will encourage and facilitate cross-servicing of agency customers in county offices through legislative, administrative, technological, and other

mechanisms that may prove useful, given the limitations that may exist due to a lack of employee program knowledge or lack of required technical skills. Emphasis will be placed on combining the most efficient possible use of USDA resources with the most-effective possible support of customer needs, while maintaining the technical and mission integrity of the partner agencies.

This initiative will be pursued in the following stages:

- ***January 2000—Analyze FY 1999 customer survey results to determine customer needs.***
- ***February 2000—Identify cross-servicing concepts based on current BPR and pilot testing experience.***
- ***April 2000—Identify mechanisms to facilitate cross-servicing.***
- ***June 2000—Begin testing of cross-servicing solutions.***

2.1.2.2.3 Partnership

Because USDA Service Center agencies are county-based agencies, they enjoy a unique, historical partnership with the local communities they serve. Local farmers have played an important role in determining the USDA services to be offered in their own communities. Their voices are heard through county committees and through active solicitation of feedback. Emphasis has been placed on employing various partnerships to maximize the available resources and attain common goals. Partnership possibilities include the spectrum of public- and private-sector organizations, private industry, USDA agencies, and other Government agencies.

The implementation and operation of Service Centers depend on a partnership formed between the Service Center agencies (FSA, NRCS, and Rural Development). To ensure broad success of the initiative, other USDA agencies, such as the Cooperative Extension Service and the Forest Service, have been included in the decision-making process and participate in the one-stop service concept, which will be fundamental to future Service Center operations. The same kind of involvement has been offered to non-USDA agencies, such as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), state and local agencies, and non-Federal partners such as conservation districts. The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) is an important Service Center partner, providing state and local perspectives.

Labor-management and leadership partnerships also play a critical role in designing the Service Centers' future. At the outset of Service Center implementation, the National Food and Agriculture Council (NFAC) unanimously agreed to invite union and employee association participation in the process. The working relationship between management and unions has improved communications among Service Center employees, management, and Service Center working teams.

Another area where partnerships are extremely important is the Geographic Information System (GIS). The broad implementation of the GIS strategy cannot be successful without strong partner relationships with other Federal, state, and local government entities, as well as with private-sector organizations. These partnerships foster development of the framework and other data themes common to similar GIS implementations.

2.1.2.2.4 Outreach

One of the most important missions of the USDA Service Centers is to ensure that all customers have equal access to programs and services. As the USDA "front line," Service Centers play a critical role in implementing

the full spectrum of outreach activities for the department, including specific recommendations made by the Civil Rights Action Team (CRAT) and the National Commission on Small Farms (NCSF). To help remove barriers to serving under-represented customers, the CRAT recommended that USDA:

- Consider under-served communities in determining Service Center locations.
- Establish satellite offices where necessary to reach under-served customers.
- Establish full-time Service Centers on Indian tribal lands.

In January 1998, the NCSF made a number of recommendations for USDA to improve outreach and program delivery, including:

- Developing and disseminating training and educational materials.
- Developing networks, mentoring programs, and consortia for small farm and ranch operators.
- Holding local USDA agency personnel and supervisors accountable for target audience outreach programming.

USDA also must comply with Section 2501(g) of the 1990 Food and Agriculture Trade and Conservation Act. Section 2501(g) stipulates that the Secretary shall require that the Service Center agencies establish a consolidated suboffice at tribal headquarters for a minimum of 1 day per week in each county that has a reservation.

In response to the need to expand outreach activities, National and State Outreach Councils are being established to enhance program and service delivery to under-served communities. The National Outreach Council (NOC) is a policy body that assists states to develop and review outreach activities. State Outreach Councils (SOC) provide a sounding board to ensure that outreach plans meet the needs of under-served communities and groups within the state. The NFAC is working in cooperation with the National Office of Outreach at USDA to establish these councils.

In a 1997 departmental directive, the NFAC required states to develop and submit specific plans for meeting the needs of under-served communities. States were required to submit short-term plans in December 1997 and long-term plans in April 1998. These plans identified the customer information and resources required for the implementation of outreach plans and specified actions that must be taken to:

- Engage under-served communities.
- Improve access to USDA programs and services.
- Assess needs.
- Obtain input about service improvements required.

Under direction from the Assistant Secretary for Administration, the NFAC is responsible for reviewing state plans, monitoring progress of the implementation effort, and reporting significant developments. The NFAC is now working with NOC and states to further develop and implement long-term outreach plans.

2.1.2.3 Business Process Reengineering (BPR) and Improvement

The Information Technology Management Reform Act requires executive agencies to analyze their missions and, before making significant investments in information technology to support those missions, revise their mission-related and administrative processes as appropriate.

This requirement supports the USDA desire to assess and adjust current business practices in support of Service Center strategic directions. USDA is committed to fundamentally changing the way its Service Centers conduct business. In fact, delivering one-stop service is nearly impossible in the current environment. Simply sharing a customer's address and phone number electronically is not possible, let alone sharing up-to-date location information through GIS. The existing USDA Service Center business processes and IT infrastructure have major deficiencies that adversely affect both service quality and operating efficiency, and are completely inadequate to meet foreseeable demands. Service Center operations may currently be described as a series of "stovepipe" units staffed by a dedicated group of employees, delivering important services independently to an overlapping set of customers. This practice results in inefficient and costly delivery, placing an unacceptable burden on USDA customers. Operations also are composed of many complex and cumbersome processes, resulting in untimely delivery of services and incomplete or outdated information.

The SCI BPR objectives are to:

- Improve customer service and reduce customer burden.
- Reengineer core Service Center processes from an enterprise perspective.
- Integrate Service Center processes to provide one USDA voice to customers, where possible.
- Share common information.
- Identify and prioritize the highest payback areas in terms of a favorable return on investment.
- Provide USDA management with a recommendation as to whether to proceed with investment in IT and BPR.
- Reduce the cost of Service Center operations while improving quality.

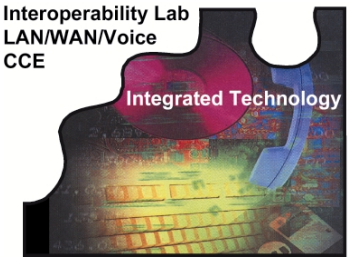
USDA intends to reengineer 100 percent of Service Center business and is taking an incremental approach to BPR. Currently, the SCI has initiated the reengineering of approximately 60 percent of Service Center business, beginning with those portions expected to provide the most substantial benefits. USDA is planning to reengineer the remaining 40 percent over the next several years, as resources become available.

2.1.2.4 Consolidation of Administrative Procedures or Support Functions

Administrative convergence is key to reengineering the Service Center agencies. Currently, three separate administrative structures provide support to NRCS, FSA, and the Rural Development mission areas. ***USDA is committed to streamline operations by combining these three structures into one Sup-***

port Services Unit and delegating the authority to conduct most administrative functions to the state level, closer to the customer. The plan assumes a reduction of approximately 47 percent in administrative staffing for these agencies between 1993 and 2002. Savings accrued from these changes will be used to support basic program staff and improved services to USDA clients. The full benefit of this reorganization will not be realized until administrative systems can be redesigned and supported by compatible technology.

2.1.2.5 Integrated Technology



The Service Center agencies are completely reengineering automation support to the county-based field structure, which is currently a series of organizational, technical, and communications "stovepipes." Reengineering includes an organizational redesign implemented under the administrative convergence initiative, the LAN/WAN/ Voice project, a Common Computing Environment (CCE) project, and a data management project. Administrative convergence will implement an IT organization focusing on an integrated approach to delivering the requisite automation and telecommunications services to enable administrative support to Service Centers.

In the past, agency processes, systems, and data management have been separate operations. Implementing the Service Center concept will improve customer service by providing collocated offices and ensuring the ability to share information and deliver services in a modern business manner. Enabling this planned vision is a shared information system built around common communications standards, implemented via a LAN/WAN/ Voice infrastructure, a CCE, and an integrated data management infrastructure.

2.1.2.5.1 Interoperability Laboratory

An interoperability laboratory within the business integration center brings these technical solutions together with business changes to test and refine interoperability requirements before field testing. The interoperability lab also is used to test new technology, better understand capacity requirements, identify security issues, and test against the common architecture applications developed in agency development centers. This allows an iterative build of the Service Center architecture. Interoperability is maintained through close coordination and review by the three main strategy elements: business-driven efforts, enterprise data management, and common platform usage.

2.1.2.5.2 LAN/WAN/Voice Project

In 1995, USDA embarked on a major infrastructure initiative—deploying LAN/WAN/ Voice capability to all USDA offices. Before this initiative, there was little sharing of the telecommunications structure between agencies, to the extent that even in collocated offices, one agency could not transfer telephone calls to another agency. This infrastructure provides baseline connectivity required for leveraging reengineered business processes and automation upgrades. The goal of this project is to deliver a common telecommunications infrastructure to Service Centers, state offices, and other approved support offices nationwide. The project provides shared telephone (voice) systems, and local- and wide-area computer (data) networking, which will facilitate the implementation of USDA Service Centers, decrease telecommunications costs, and provide a common local telecom-

munications system, while enabling administrative convergence and Service Center reengineering initiatives.

2.1.2.5.3 Common Computing Environment (CCE)

The agencies' current disparate computer systems are outdated, outmoded, undersized, and do not support interoperability between agency systems and current web-based systems. Many systems do not meet standards for Y2K compliance. The CCE builds on the initial investment in shared information technology represented by the LAN/ WAN/Voice Project and enables an integrated data management infrastructure. The objectives of the CCE are to:

- Gain significant efficiency by sharing the same hardware and software within Service Centers.
- Overcome the extreme limitations of sharing information using the current or legacy systems.
- Take advantage of current technology gains and put Service Centers in the mainstream of IT applications.
- Provide an environment that enables effective reengineering of business processes.
- Achieve Y2K compliance for Service Centers.
- Draft Test and Implementation Plans (completed in the first quarter of fiscal year 1998).
- Conduct live test demonstrations (the first components of CCE alternatives were completed in April 1998).
- Select pilot-site hardware and basic office automation software (completed in February 1998).

CCE will provide the Service Center hardware and software needed to develop the integrated business systems necessary to make one-stop service a reality and to deploy the reengineered business processes. At the core of this vision is a shared information system that will provide Service Center personnel access to customer, program, technical, and administrative information, regardless of the agency they represent. USDA is pursuing an incremental approach to technology modernization, which directly links to the phased approach of BPR.

2.1.2.5.4 Service Center Data Management Initiative Project

The USDA information technology data management organization is responsible for coordinating overall data management activities across business areas. The data management focus is on five major areas:

- Implementing data management policies and standards.
- Standardizing data management tools.
- Establishing a data warehouse and data mart strategy.
- Establishing the data architecture.

The Service Center data team is currently performing this centralized function. It is an interim interagency team comprising five technical working groups (TWGs) cutting across agency lines to develop a unified approach to data.

Framework for Service Center Data Management

USDA has adopted a model for enterprise data management as a framework for implementing enterprise-wide data management principles and practices. The framework, as shown in **Figure 2.1-3**, organizes the Service Centers' many data management activities into six high-level components, which fall into two major categories: (1) those that provide direction to data management activities, and (2)

those that deal with implementation. The framework describes the functions, roles, and responsibilities that constitute key components of enterprise data management, and describes the boundaries and interdependencies between the functions.

A more detailed description of these data management roles and responsibilities can be found in the Service Center Data Management Plan and the Service Center Data Administration Concept of Operations.

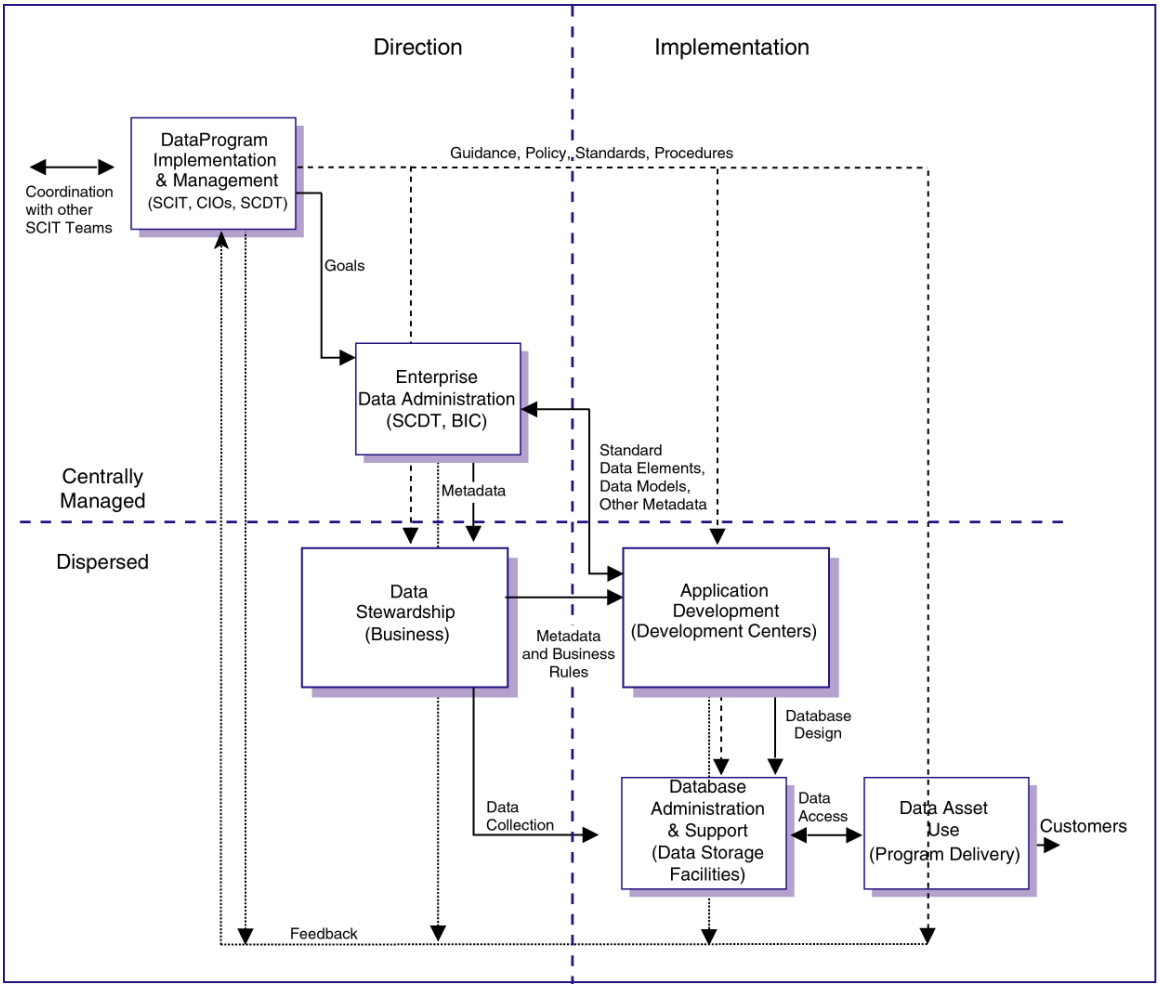


Figure 2.1-3. Enterprise-Wide Data Management

2.1.2.5.5 Geographic Information System Strategy

Through the use of the Geographic Information System (GIS) and reengineered processes, Service Centers will be able to change business operations and deliver quality products and services. GIS will automate numerous business processes and enable Service Centers to better perform key functions.

Of the technologies implemented by the Service Center Initiative, GIS will have the greatest and longest lasting impact on the products and services provided to customers. Customers think spatially; they know where their land is, where each field is, and where

the fields are in relation to other spatial features, such as roads and streams. It is natural to associate agricultural business with the land. GIS automates and manages the spatial component of land. In the future, USDA products and services will be linked spatially to digital maps. The client will associate USDA programs and business with the farms and fields to which they apply. GIS will provide accurate acreage calculations and quickly compute what-if scenarios for alternative solutions.

Using GIS to conduct Service Center business is dependent on the availability of accurate geospatial information. The various GIS data categories are commonly called data layers or themes, and 19 have been identified that are common and desirable to successfully administer programs and to service customers into the next century.

Four of these 19 themes have been identified by one or more Service Center agencies as critical to support the Service Centers' mission. The following four data themes are the most important; without them, Service Center agencies cannot effectively use GIS technology to create products for customer, partner, or internal use:

- Orthoimagery.
- Common land unit.
- Soils.
- Cultural and demographic data.

Although the critical data themes are not scheduled to be completely implemented until the year 2007, incremental data and GIS capability will provide large business benefits to Service Centers and their customers. Some of these benefits already have been documented in the USDA Geospatial BPR Report, dated August 29, 1997. These benefits will accrue immediately to those counties with GIS capabilities, even before full implementation, and include:

- Ability to use geospatial information to make informed business decisions.
- Access to current, accurate geospatial information 80 percent faster than traditional manual methods.
- Access to geospatial information by all agencies simultaneously.
- Access to a common base map that is jointly managed.
- Elimination of redundant work and data, resulting in reduced Service Center workload.
- Improved map quality.
- Service from any center.

2.2 Model Service Center

The mission of the Model Service Center is to deliver conservation, agricultural, and rural economic development programs leveraging shared partner agency resources. Efficiency is achieved by leveraging local resources to support delivery of common programs that have been developed and prioritized to meet the needs of our eligible customers, optimizing service delivery per Federal dollar.
The Model Service Center serves as a mechanism to focus efforts on a common target, which reflects one means of satisfying the business needs outlined in **Section 1.2.2—Gap Analysis**. A Model Service Center is defined as the county-based office that capitalizes on inherent commonality across agencies in mission, operations, and support infrastructure to meet the needs of eligible customers in the county area. The Model Service Center is the operational unit within the national network of offices for delivery of conservation, agriculture, and rural economic development programs, as well as the provision of products, services, education, and information.

Transition to the Model Service Center is occurring over several phases. The following graphics represent an overview of how the county-based Service Center will operate between 1998 and 2003.

Initial Integration and Testing Phase

Initial integration and testing occurred in 1998. Service Center collocation neared completion, and more than 20,000 employees engaged in customer service training and were introduced to the cultural change impact that will occur in the next several years. This phase established the foundation across the partner agencies to support future modernization efforts. **Figure 2.2-1** represents a collocated Service Center that is still highly paper intensive, with some ad hoc sharing primarily driven by the good intentions of hard working employees.

Pilot Integration and Testing Phase

Key infrastructure elements of the modernization were developed in 1999, including significant progress in an integrated geospatial delivery foundation, completion of the LAN/WAN/Voice telecommunications infrastructure, acquisition of nearly 30,000 desktop and laptop computers for county-based offices, installation of 27 pilot sites for business process and technical testing, and exploration of improved outreach and program delivery mechanisms. **Figure 2.2-2** shows the Model Service Center being built first in pilot locations while some infrastructure is put in place at the county and state level.

Virtual Service Center

The Model Service Center in 2000–2003 will have fully deployed capability for the public to access and conduct business with USDA electronically. USDA will use technology to better understand the demographics and needs of its customers and to serve their ever changing needs quickly. It will partner with the community to better understand local and regional requirements. The infrastructure will provide the flexibility for USDA to provide creative delivery mechanisms while accomplishing back-office activities at reduced cost. This is depicted in **Figure 2.2-3**.

Figure 2.2-1. Initial Integration and Testing—1998

Figure 2.2-2. Pilot Integration and Testing—1999

Figure 2.2-3. Virtual Service Center—2000–2003

Core Business Processes

The SCI initially selected an activity-based reengineering methodology because it best supported the conduct of activity-based costing used in the initial economic justification (Service Center Business Case, October 1997). The SCI has transitioned to reengineering a set of core business areas, which include:

- Community Development.
- Lending.
- Managing Risk.
- Conservation.

There are also a number of support services being reengineered that will allow core businesses to operate more efficiently. Some of those projects are managed under the SCI administrative business area, while others are managed as technical infrastructure projects.

Historically, much of the Service Center interaction with customers has been one-on-one contact at a local USDA facility. In the future, the partner agencies will migrate to an environment where a greater proportion of information exchange and transaction processing occur through off-site alternates. Key components will include:

- Providing information about programs, availability, and eligibility requirements through the Internet and other electronic media (telephone and hotline support).
- Providing online information collection and transaction processing capability (such as forms and interactive, web-based applications), and reusing information previously collected to reduce the aggregate information collection and burden on customers.
- Developing information collection and management partnerships with state and local agricultural entities and private organizations to integrate information collection and sharing mechanisms among all service providers.

This shared information environment is the cornerstone for delivering USDA business at the county level.

Some core business processes are similar across agencies with respect to supporting activities, competencies and skill requirements for their delivery. The Model Service Center, therefore, relies on the opportunity for consolidation of these core business processes and the sharing of supporting activities among existing office agencies.

Operation of the county-based office relies on staff and partners to deliver products and services and execute program delivery. Operation of the Model Service Center will require investment in people through retraining and recruitment where prudent and applicable.

The Model Service Center includes significant interaction with customers in face to face engagements. Each core business process is broken into face-to-face activities and activities that can be accomplished away from the customer. The latter activities have the opportunity to be consolidated, centralized, or redesigned toward operating more effectively where benefits outweigh costs. These activities can be moved out of the county office.

The Model Service Center depends on technology to collect, analyze, and distribute information. This infrastructure includes common computing equipment, integrated data, and a common telecommunication backbone.

The Model Service Center will allow employees to focus their primary effort on core business processes by reducing the amount of time they spend on administrative information

management and related activities. This is being accomplished primarily through reengineering of Service Center infrastructure support; communications; hardware; desktop software; and integrated shareable customer, land, and program information. The reengineering and movement to a single infrastructure facilitates the reengineering of all business areas.

The Model Service Center optimizes USDA service delivery at the county level. It seeks to improve service and efficiency by leveraging technology in a distributed computing environment. A principal strategy for implementing the Model Service Center is through improved distribution of work between front-office and back-office activities.

Front-office activities are those that primarily involve face-to-face customer interaction. These activities may involve disseminating information, providing and receiving applications, and providing consulting services and direct assistance to customers. Customer service is the cornerstone of the Service Center operations. As such, improving the quality of front-office activities directly affects the delivery of USDA customer service.

Back-office activities are those that can primarily be performed without direct customer contact. Back-office activities use customer-provided information along with additional information and processes to perform activities to support an end service or product to the customer. Activities may include determining eligibility, processing applications, monitoring compliance, producing plans, and performing analyses. Back-office activities present opportunities for efficiencies to counter continued fiscal resource constraints. These efficiencies may include leveraging cross-agency resources or partnering with community organizations. Improvements in back-office activities also enable a more concerted focus of Service Center operations on front-office activities and the direct interface with customers and service delivery.

Cross-servicing of customers implies opportunities for cross-sharing roles and responsibilities in the Model Service Center. The requirement to share roles and responsibilities will be accommodated through cross-training programs.

The Model Service Center will define customer requirements within its region by partnering with those customers to evaluate opportunities to improve services and products. Local-level plans will focus on the customer base to determine needs and apply resources based on that analysis. Thus, the workload distribution will be a function of local planning and merging the results with Congressionally dictated requirements.

An example of a customer's experience in the Service Center as it exists today and as it will exist in the future Model Service Center demonstrates the partner agencies' ultimate target. The next piece of this document portrays the Model Service Center at two separate levels. The first provides the view of employees, customers, and other stakeholders, reflecting the business, applications and technology layers of the Model Service Center architecture. It describes business drivers in the form of objectives and walks the reader through Model Service Center expectations. The second level walks a customer through the notional lifecycle of an activity that will occur regularly in the future Service Center, to provide a better understanding of customer impact.

2.2.1 Model Service Center: Business

The goals of quality customer service, cost reduction, one-stop shopping, and partnership are being attained by targeting a set of business objectives that will satisfy both internal and external customer needs. These goal and objective statements become the business drivers that will provide focus as we implement this modernization strategy. **Figure 2.2-4** illustrates Model Service Center objectives and goals.

2.2.2 Model Service Center: Applications/Data

Figure 2.2-5 depicts the overall applications' goals for users.

Model Service Center Business Objectives and Goals			
Objective Statement	**Customer Goals**	**Service Center Staff Goals**	**Stakeholder Goals**
Objective Statement 1: Improve the Delivery of USDA Products and Services	1. "I don't want to have to drive from agency to agency to get the information I need or spend hours in an office waiting for someone to research what agency is responsible." Provide one-stop shopping. Coordinate overlapping programs across agencies and create a seamless customer interface across programs, offices, and agencies. Provide a range of services at each Service Center, with complex services at fewer locations. Provide the full range of program information and services from any location, regardless of the responsible agency.	1. "I work for FSA in a small office where there are no FTEs from other partner agencies. How do I help someone with a question regarding conservation?" Provide staff with skills, knowledge, and tools to provide services across all mission areas.	1. "We want to reduce overall time and cost to deliver goods and services." Share field delivery and administrative activities across agencies. 2. "We want to increase customer service to include cross-agency requirements." Permit Service Center to interface with both USDA and external agencies (e.g., United States Geological Survey (USGS)) to provide cross-agency products and services. 3. "We need to provide our services more efficiently and effectively at the Service Centers." Reduce personnel costs of administering programs in Service Centers by cross-training staff on basic agency programs. Increase service delivery by adequately training personnel and staffing Service Centers hours based on regional needs. 4. "We want Service Centers to be able to expedite their programs in a responsive manner." Simplify the policies, processes, regulations and reporting procedures and make them customer-focused. Respond to and implement program changes more quickly.

Figure 2.2-4 Model Service Center Business Objectives and Goals (Page 1 of 3)

Model Service Center Business Objectives and Goals			
Objective Statement	**Customer Goals**	**Service Center Staff Goals**	**Stakeholder Goals**
Objective Statement 2: Improve Customer Satisfaction	1. "Last week my neighbor had to return to the agency office three times in an effort to complete an application. I can't afford to spend that much time running around. I hope I have everything I need." Provide customers with clear, reliable, and easy to understand information and forms. Assist with form completion if necessary. 2. "There is a lot of personal information required for these forms. I don't want people to know how much my revenue is." Ensure customer information privacy. Provide a safe and private environment in which the customer can outline needs without worrying about who will hear or see.	1, "I wish I knew what I could do to assist customers in understanding they are our priority." Obtain feedback from customers systematically. Record, respond to, and resolve customer complaints at the first point of contact. 2. "How do I know I am improving our office customer service record?" Improve rate of customer-defined "satisfactorily resolved items."	

Figure 2.2-4 Model Service Center Business Objectives and Goals (Page 2 of 3)

Model Service Center Business Objectives and Goals			
Objective Statement	**Customer Goals**	**Service Center Staff Goals**	**Stakeholder Goals**
Objective Statement 3: Improve Internal Operations and Management			1. "What is the current status of loans outstanding? How many are delinquent or nearing payoff?" Improve management of the loan portfolio. Provide on-demand reporting. 2. "Where do we stand with project milestones and expenditures to date, versus our annual projections?" Integrate finance and program management systems. Provide financial reports on demand. 3. "What are our budget projections for the year 2002?" Move toward common or integrated budgeting to reduce redundancy in costing projections. 4. "Are we meeting our performance objectives?" Track and report relevant performance information with an automated decision support system. Utilize a performance based management approach to internal operations. Provide the ability to analyze raw data and process it into information products. 5. "We need to improve the processing time for administrative requests." Reduce the approval levels/ bureaucracy. Decrease paperwork in administrative management, and improve/streamline internal operations. 6. "How do we make sure customers and employees have the information regarding agency programs?" Perform common planning and scheduling for program and employee activities. Provide the ability to create, process, share, store, retrieve, and communicate information.

Figure 2.2-4 Model Service Center Business Objectives and Goals (Page 3 of 3)

Overall Applications' Goals for Users		
Customer Goals	**Service Center Staff Goals**	**Stakeholder Goals**
"I can do business with USDA in the manner I prefer—in the office, at my farm/house, or self-service." A variety of methods are available to the customer to interface with USDA.	"I don't know or care what application I'm currently in." Seamless integration between applications. Users don't need to focus on applications, just seamless navigation between tools that help them do their job. Online help is available so that if questions arise, hard copy manuals for specific applications are not required.	"Today we loaned over $400,000 to under-served individuals in Representative X's district." Real-time reports can be generated for items that are not current requirements.
"The turn-around time (approval, funds disbursement) is so quick." Customer applications are automatically electronically routed to approvers or their designees; approvers can electronically sign and forward.	"New updates are intuitive." Incorporate a common look and feel to applications based on user input and industry recommendations so that new programs and updates require only brief explanations and reference materials.	"We need to respond to the disaster rapidly." Centralized common business rules allow modifications in program criteria to be quickly updated in one place and distributed overnight.
"I can almost watch the approval process take place." Use online web technologies to allow customers to get real-time status tracking.	"It's just as easy to work offsite with a client as it is in the office." Checking out client files from a server or accessing information through a web site will enable people to do business wherever it makes sense.	"Where are most of the Conservation Plans dealing with waterway rerouting done? How many customers have CRP fields ready for renewal? This new report requires all sunflower producers growing over 40 acres use XYZ—how many do we work with?" Program Analysis and "What if" questions can have immediate answers.
"This winter, let's go to Florida, honey. I can still check on my program sign-up status on my laptop or the USDA office in Florida." Customer information is available anywhere in the United States for customers or USDA staff.	"I can do so much more now in the same amount of time. Even things I never thought were possible." Applications will be flexible tools that evolve based on user demands— create ad hoc queries, using measurement tools to help design fence requirements, etc.	"Technology has changed so that it's cheaper to use satellite instead of land lines for computer communications." N-tiered applications are flexible enough to respond to redistribution at various layers.

Figure 2.2-5. Overall Applications' Goals for Users (Page 1 of 2)

Overall Applications' Goals for Users		
Customer Goals	**Service Center Staff Goals**	**Stakeholder Goals**
"I can investigate, apply for, and receive USDA services without having to leave my home." Remote service can be instituted securely— online program descriptions, electronic applications, and electronic distribution are all possible.	"I can explain the requirements for a loan and show you the online worksheet so you can see what type of loan would work for you and what you could qualify for right away (even though I'm an NRCS engineer)." Training/tools available for cross use of resources.	"Look, that other department had another hacking incident. I'm glad we implement security in depth." Security will be built into the business processes, applications, and data access. Ensure EDI and customer access are also achievable.
	"These technology tools can be used for all kinds of other useful purposes. We use the internet to track storms, look at rainfall, distribute information, monitor Congressional hearings on disaster legislation for farmers, get the latest policy updates as needed, cut down on paper copies, etc." Tools are useful to people in different ways. Technology can enable employees in ways others can't currently envision.	

Figure 2.2-5. Overall Applications' Goals for Users (Page 2 of 2)

2.2.3 Model Service Center: Technology

The common computing environment design and implementation strategy is driven by the need to provide the enabling technology in order to reengineer the business of the Service Center partner agencies. While some reengineered business activities do not require any automation, the majority of activities within Service Centers can (and currently do) benefit from some level of automation. Where activities are supported by automation, the systems are stovepipe in nature; that is, it is not possible to share information between agencies, with customers, and with other systems. In addition, much of the geospatial information managed within Service Centers is not automated in any form and records are maintained on paper and aerial photographs.

In total, the reengineered business activities of the partner agencies span needs such as communications, office automation activities, lending money, dispersing commodity program funds, environmental engineering, geospatial analysis, and general record keeping. Since the general strategy is to take advantage of commercially available solutions as much as possible, the first challenge is to design a common computing architecture that will accommodate as many of these needs as is possible. The second challenge is to devise a strategy that implements this environment in discrete, stand-alone components that make

sense both from a business and technical perspective.

The overall technology goals for the model Service Center are based on the following business requirements:

- Administrative convergence.
- Information sharing with customers.
- Common office automation tools.
- Geographic information systems infused into Service Center activities.
- Information collection only once.
- Mobility for Service Centers.
- Customer access to information.
- Reengineered applications in the best environment.

Overall Technology Goals

- Delivery of partner agency administrative services from one consolidated organization. Reengineering is vigorously under way in this business area. Early phases of the CCE implementation should provide the infrastructure necessary to implement the reengineered processes that will make consolidation of administrative functions successful.

- Electronic sharing of information between customers and Service Centers in common formats (i.e., letters, spreadsheets, etc.). The current computing environments within the Service Centers do no allow for this.

- A single office automation toolkit within the installed CCE environment to facilitate sharing of information as well as sharing of personnel resources. The Service Center partner agencies currently have three different word processing and spreadsheet environments installed. Personnel from each agency cannot share information between these environments and do not know how to use the software in their partner agencies.

- Automating the retrieval of geospatial data is critical for reengineering Service Center business processes. The Geospatial BPR team recognized that while the majority of Service Center processes use map-based information, almost all this information is still held on paper in manual systems. Often this paper is duplicated for use within several processes and is maintained simultaneously by several Service Center agencies. This leads to customers' receiving different information from each agency for the same area of land. The CCE environment must provide the infrastructure necessary to collect, manipulate, analyze, display, and distribute this information.

- Single data environment where some information is not "shared" or transferred, but all agencies simply use and maintain a single copy of the database. An example of this is customer information such as name and address. Reengineered applications for all agencies will all use a single customer database that is jointly maintained.

- Service Center mobility. Many services are performed by agency staff directly in the field or at remote office locations. A lack of direct access to information maintained at the Service Center often forces the field personnel to transport a wide variety of information to the field. Mobile electronic access to this information will allow one-time data entry and information delivery while at the customer's location.

- Capability for customers to access program information directly using the Internet. Our society is rapidly changing with

regard to expectations relative to information availability. Customers should be able to directly change their own address and perform other types of simple business transactions without traveling to a Service Center office. Customers who make use of Precision Agriculture technology should be able to gain access to digital imagery, field boundaries, soil surveys, and other basic map data to support their operations.

Overall Technology Benefits

- Facilitate one-stop shopping concept.
- Create common policies and procedures for partner agencies.
- Reduce redundant functions.
- Reduce the cost of doing business.
- Support and improve services to the customer. More efficient response to concerns.
- Deliver effective/enhanced programs to customers.
- Enable common electronic user interface.
- Facilitate information sharing between customers and agencies.
- Increase communication between agencies and customers.
- Increase the number of customers served.
- Reduce time required to meet customer needs.
- Empower customers to assist themselves, if desired, with minimal intervention by USDA staff.
- Provide more readily accessible USDA program data via the Internet.
- Make available accurate and complete customer data across agencies.

Overall, the technology of the Model Service Center should provide an optimum environment for reengineering to occur. Specifically, the CCE environment should be rich with commercially available applications. The environment should be easy to use and within the mainstream of the IT industry. Service Centers are dispersed throughout the country and often are located in remote, rural areas. Personnel in these sites should be able to receive extra training and support for common activities from local sources of expertise. The CCE should provide multiple levels for application development. Specifically, some applications may be accomplished by "macros" while others may require a large, customized software program. Finally, the CCE environment should allow for a transition period where both legacy and new business processes exist side by side.

2.2.4 Model Service Center Scenarios

If the SCI attains its goals, future Service Centers will operate as described in the following scenarios. These scenarios represent only a fraction of the services to be provided in the Model Service Center.

2.2.4.1 Scenario 1

Using the customer view of the business, the SCI team identified improvements that will be gained from the reengineered business and proposed BPR projects. The following is an example of one of many possible lifecycles or processes. Major stages of this customer lifecycle include:

- Service Center and partners determine best way to support their county.
- Customer without USDA information.
- Customer needs additional information.
- Customer desires program eligibility determination.
- Customer applies for a program.
- Customer works with USDA to develop a plan.
- Customer contracts with USDA.
- Customer reacts to compliance issues.

To illustrate the customer lifecycle, the SCI team developed a scenario through which a potential USDA customer in need of program assistance might go—the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) process. The current environment, the improved environment, and examples of resulting savings and benefits are illustrated.

Scenario

As beneficiary of her mother's will, Joan Lewis is bequeathed land previously recorded by USDA but located in two separate counties in Mississippi. Joan's situation is reasonably straightforward, and it is assumed that CRP sign-up is in progress.

Customer without USDA Information

Current Situation

In the current operating environment, Joan has two options to determine available USDA programs. Assuming Joan is aware that USDA offers programs that may assist her with her newly acquired land, she can phone or drive to the Service Center to ask questions about available programs. However, neither of these options offers Joan convenient access to program information. She may be required to explain her situation numerous times to various agencies and program experts, particularly if she is not familiar with USDA's current programs. Consequently, Joan's first encounter with USDA may be a frustrating experience.

Recommended Changes

In the future Service Center, USDA will provide multiple options to bring USDA to Joan. Examples of recommended changes that will result from proposed projects include:

- Providing the means for USDA to increase outreach efforts, especially to rural or under-served areas, by disseminating information through local media measures and sponsoring conferences to expose USDA programs and services; providing handicap access and service to non-English-speaking persons.
- Reducing Joan's number of trips by providing multiple options for Service Centers to disseminate information:
  - Providing hotlines (1-800 numbers) to answer specific questions or concerns
  - Providing an "Electronic Gateway to USDA," which will include unmanned, stand-alone sites in Service Centers or other public locations where Joan could access basic information on all USDA programs.
- By sending out program information before sign-up periods, USDA could contact Joan to inform her that she was potentially qualified to participate in a USDA program.
- Providing directives electronically from the national office to Service Centers will disseminate program information to employees in a timely manner.

Anticipated Benefits

The changes resulting from these projects will allow USDA to provide information to Joan at her convenience while reducing Service Center contact time. Through implementation of recommended changes, Joan will receive consistent and accurate information from a single informed source. In addition, Service Center employees will be knowledgeable of programs when Joan inquires about them.

As a result of the proposed changes, savings will be predominantly realized by the Service Center customers. For example, Service Center employees will be able to notify eligible customers before the beginning of the sign-up period. This changes the process from reactive to proactive and allows the customer to decide whether or not to pursue program participation

without making a trip to the Service Center. Customers will be exposed more often to USDA program information through increased outreach efforts and will have access to information through hotlines, unmanned booths, and the Internet. In addition, dissemination of program information will improve since Service Center employees will receive program information and training in a timely manner.

Customer Needs Additional Information

Current Situation

Joan is now aware of available USDA programs. In the current environment, Joan may be required to visit a Service Center to obtain more detailed program requirements and pick up application forms. Inefficiencies that currently exist include:

- If the program requires multiple agency involvement, Joan will be required to meet with multiple representatives from the respective agencies and supply redundant customer information to each agency.
- Appropriate staff from each agency may not be accessible when Joan is there.
- In all likelihood, Joan is not aware of the information or documentation required to process her application and will be required to revisit the Service Center after obtaining the necessary information.

Consequently, Joan spends much of her time unproductively waiting for Service Center employees only to discover she has to return to repeat the experience.

Recommended Changes

In the future Service Center, USDA will make all the necessary processing information available to Joan before her visit to the Service Center or scheduled appointment with a program specialist. Additionally, Joan could acquire and complete application forms at her convenience, before her scheduled appointment, further reducing Service Center staff involvement. Joan will no longer be required to wait or make unproductive visits to the Service Center. Specific changes from proposed projects include:

- Central points of contact will schedule an appropriate specialist to meet with Joan to provide program guidance and expertise. The appointment may be scheduled at the Service Center or, in certain circumstances, at Joan's home or office. One visit with one Service Center employee can complete the application process.
- If Joan visits the Service Center without an appointment or prior to obtaining available forms or information, she will be greeted by a Service Center representative who will be cross-trained in basic information for all programs. The representative will provide Joan with general information referrals on applicable USDA programs and help her schedule an appointment with the appropriate specialist. Program fact sheets will be available that include details about benefits, basic eligibility requirements, a process checklist, required documentation, etc.
- In addition, since Joan is a new customer requesting USDA service, the coordinator will enter her customer information into a Shared Data Repository. This customer profile information will be accessed whenever necessary by all agencies and counties.
- Information will be provided to customers before their visit to the Service Center, and they will be able to submit inquiries electronically.
- A Service Center Home Page will detail USDA program information, including benefits, basic eligibility requirements, a

process checklist, required documentation, application forms, etc. Joan could submit her questions electronically directly to USDA and enter much of her own customer information, which would then be accessed by the program specialist scheduled to process Joan's application.

Anticipated Benefits

These changes will ensure that USDA has maximized Joan's use of time and reduced the number of erroneous contacts and visits to the Service Center. Joan will have an appointment and be aware of the information that is required for processing her application before arrival at a Service Center. In addition, the program specialist will spend less time answering general questions and entering basic customer information.

Process changes will allow customers to choose the method by which they receive program information, and that information will be provided in a timely manner. Information will be available to customers via such methods as mobile offices (i.e., outfitted vans), unmanned electronic booths, toll-free hotlines, and the Internet. Customers will know what information they need to bring with them before their arrival at the Service Center. These alternatives will eliminate the need for most customers to visit a Service Center before application and, as a result, reduce time demands on Service Center employees. In addition, the Shared Data Repository will reduce redundant entry of information by multiple agencies.

Customer Desires Program Eligibility Determination

Current Situation

Through her previous contacts with USDA (either through the toll-free phone number, information on the Internet, or discussions with the Service Center representative), Joan has determined that she will apply for the CRP. Currently, for USDA to determine customer and land eligibility, Joan must supply information previously provided, and Service Center staff must manually review numerous paper forms, maps, and aerial photos.

Recommended Changes

In the future, when she arrives at the Service Center Joan may already have an appointment with a program specialist to discuss program eligibility, possibly for the first time. Specific changes that will ensure USDA provides a program eligibility determination in a timely manner include:

- Streamlining processes for collecting, updating, and reviewing eligibility information, including the:
  - Ownership determination and land eligibility process
  - Map distribution process.
- Providing centralized employee training focusing on customer service.
- Providing remote access to customer and land eligibility information.
- Providing the capability for Service Centers to access, analyze, update, share, and store necessary geospatial data to determine eligibility.

Anticipated Benefits

As a result, Joan will receive timely responses, consistent rankings, and accurate data. In addition, she will have less paperwork to complete. Joan will be able to access her customer eligibility information and check the status of her determination. The proposed projects will allow Service Center employees to improve time management and develop customer planning business parameters more accurately and efficiently.

Significant process change will occur in collecting, updating, and reviewing information required for eligibility from those customers who visit the Service Center. For example, land ownership and cropping eligibility information will be collected once and maintained in a standard database that will be accessible to all agencies and counties. This will eliminate the need for the customer to provide the same information to individual agencies.

Figure 2.2-6 is a segment of the CRP process flow that has been included to illustrate the process savings resulting from projects for determining eligibility. The proposed changes will eliminate multiple steps from the process, including:

- Filling out the 578 form (Process No. 71-72).
- Pulling cropping history (Process No. 70N).
- Attaching copies of 156 form to crop reports (Process No. 74-N).

In addition, the three-step process of reviewing land ownership eligibility and cropping eligibility for completion of the FSA-578 (Process Nos. 64–67) will be combined into one step (Process No. 68). Overall, the BPR teams estimate a 50 to 80 percent reduction in time and a 50 percent reduction in paper processing to determine eligibility by eliminating, combining, and automating many manual steps.

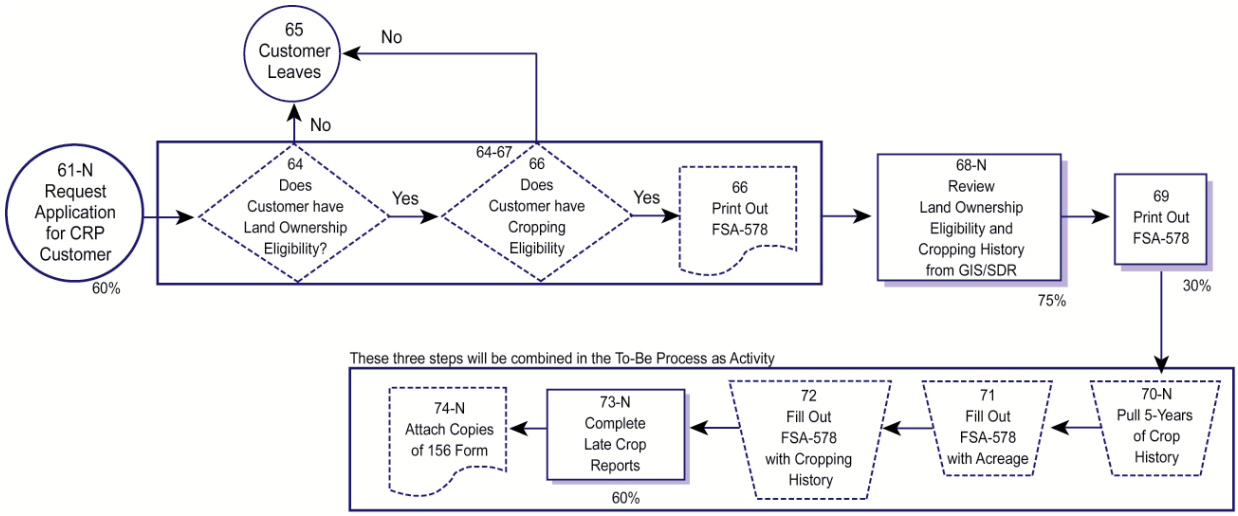


Figure 2.2-6. Determine Eligibility Process Change

Customer Applies for a Program

Current Situation

In the current environment, to apply for CRP, Joan is required to coordinate among agencies and, in her case, between two counties. Joan must fill out numerous forms with redundant information and wait for that information to be manually passed between agencies and counties. This environment does little to provide Joan with timely approval notices or a quick delivery of benefits.

Recommended Changes

In the future, Joan will have an appointment with a program specialist at a Service Center (or her residence) to process the application, will have access to applicable forms and information, and will have provided basic customer information before meeting at the

Service Center. The following recommended changes will result from proposed projects and assist in the CRP application process:

- Provide bid and payment rates to Joan prior to sign up.
- Streamline the information retrieval processes.
- Reduce the approval steps for programs (make decisions at local levels vs. national).
- Make approvals online (no need to pass paper forms from one office or agency to another).
- Provide electronic access to applicable forms and information.
- Share access to basic customer information and develop one common database among partnering agencies that will reduce the amount of redundant data collected from the customer.
- Provide the capability for Service Centers to access, analyze, update, share, and store necessary geospatial data required to complete and approve her application.

The following critical steps in the process will be performed electronically:

- Transmit CRP-1 to USDA headquarters.
- Review bid determinations.
- Notify customer of acceptance or rejection.
- Notify NRCS to proceed with conservation plan development.

Anticipated Benefits

The proposed projects will result in a more timely approval process and a more efficient planning cycle for Joan. This will allow Joan to make informed business decisions and improve her profitability. Accurate, consistent, and current customer and geospatial data will be available to all levels of Service Center employees throughout the application and contract approval processes. If approved, she will be notified the same day.

The 1- to 3-month application processing time currently required will be significantly reduced to same-day processing. This reduction is possible for two reasons. First, in the future environment, all program requirements (such as eligible acres, maximum bid rates, and environmental criteria) will be announced before sign-up begins. Customers will be able to submit a reasonable bid based on the applicable program requirements. Second, many redundant approval steps will be eliminated from this process. Applications will no longer be reviewed against hard-copy documentation by the county committees before submission to USDA headquarters in Washington, DC.

- Many of the remaining steps in the streamlined process will be conducted electronically, eliminating the need to send forms between agencies and reducing time required to notify customers and other agencies.

Exhibit 2.2-7, Application Processing Process Changes, illustrates a segment of the CRP process flow, highlighting process changes resulting from a reduction in approval steps, including elimination of steps involved in querying and reviewing bid results and submitting them to headquarters and other agencies (Process Nos. 140–143). In addition, the process change will lead to an overall 50 percent reduction in the time required to notify customers (Process No. 144) and NRCS (Process No. 145).

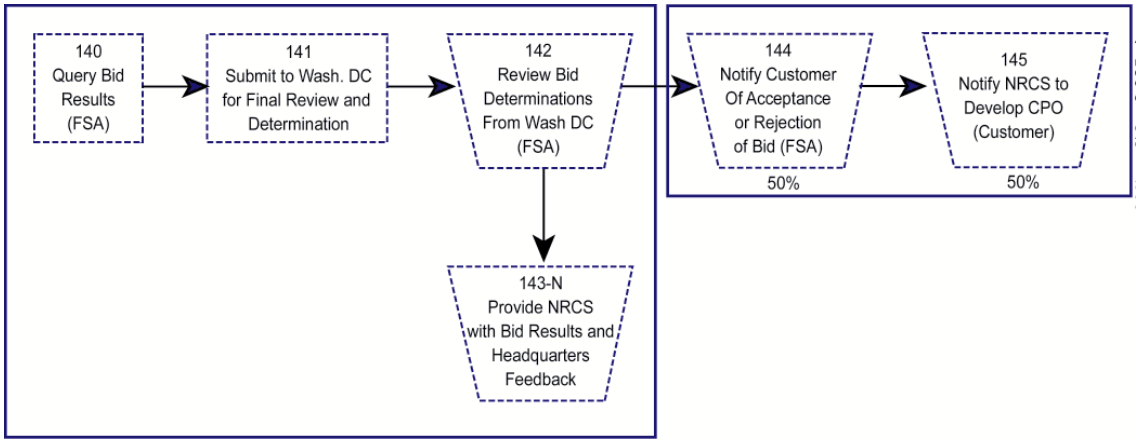


Figure 2.2-7. Application Processing Process Change

Customer Works with USDA To Develop a Plan

Current Situation

Now Joan is ready to work with USDA to develop a conservation plan for her land. She needs information about conservation practices, non-cost share practices, planning information, and program options. In the current environment, a Service Center employee, without the benefit of program or customer information, must inspect Joan's land to develop the schedule that Joan is to follow. Service Center employees manually gather information at Joan's site that is subject to interpretation at the Service Center. Information is sent back and forth between Joan and NRCS.

Recommended Changes

The following recommended changes will expedite this process in the future:

- Streamlining process to allow online approval of plans.
- Providing remote access to information, including:
  - Providing planning information over the Internet to allow customers to develop their own plans at their convenience.
  - Providing program and associated planning information to enable the farm consultant to work with the customer in developing plans to be submitted to NRCS for certification.
  - Providing remote accessibility to planning and geospatial information.
- Providing the means to share conservation and related compliance information among Service Center and Conservation District personnel through a common computing environment.
- Enabling field conservationists to provide onsite assistance to the customer, including development and printing a complete plan and associated conservation plan map.

Anticipated Benefits

The employee and Joan jointly develop alternatives, and Joan selects the alternatives and conservation practices that will make up her Conservation Plan of Operations (CPO). The Service Center employee is able to print out both the map and text data while at Joan's location, reducing time required of both Joan and the employee. In addition, her plan will be developed more quickly, with more accurate

information. The ability to manipulate the information in an electronic environment will provide Joan with the basis for making informed business decisions, improve her profitability, protect the natural resource base she stewards, and maximize use of Service Center employees' time in developing the CPO.

The improved process will allow the customer to sign the CPO electronically after an agreement is reached on the practices, schedule, and cost share. In addition, state conservation districts and county committees will be able to access and approve CPOs electronically. Online approval will not only reduce the amount of paper passed between various organizations, but also will significantly reduce the amount of time the customer must wait to enter into a contract with USDA.

Figure 2.2-8 demonstrates process changes to a segment of the CRP process flow that result from remote access of information and online approval capability. Highlights include a 60 percent reduction in time required to develop the CPO (Process No. 151-N), and elimination of the steps requiring the county committee (COC) to approve (Process No. 157-N) and deliver the CPO (Process No. 158). The improved process will incorporate the ability to remotely access information in real time and provide customers with conservation options 60 percent faster.

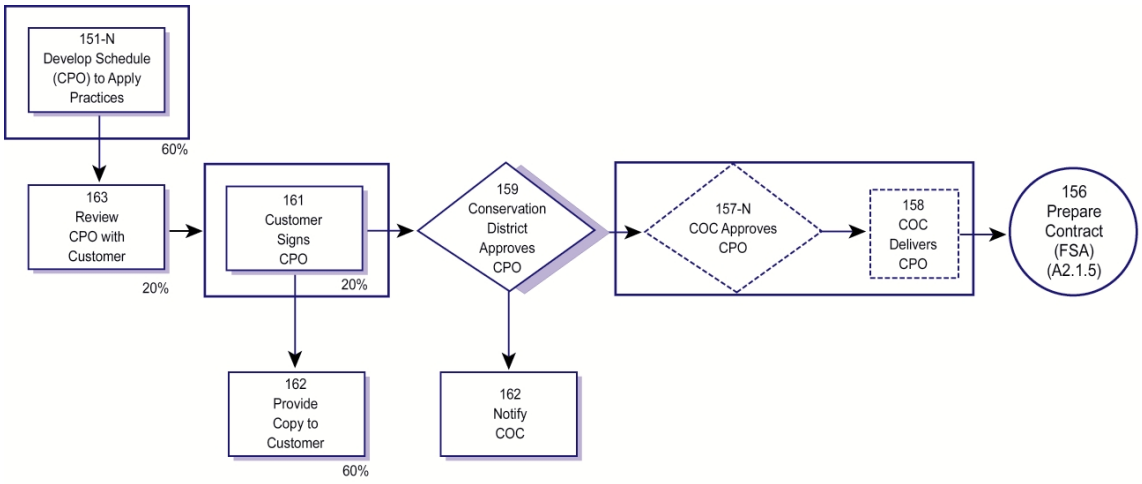


Figure 2.2-8. Conservation Plan Development Process Changes

Customer Contracts with USDA

Current Situation

After USDA approves her contract, Joan is notified and is qualified for benefits. Currently, approving the contract and issuing payment is a tedious, multiple-step process. Joan must wait for multiple paper forms to be exchanged between agencies. Information on the forms is repeatedly entered by the various agencies. In addition, Joan must wait for the county committee and national office to receive the required information so they can approve or disapprove her contract or level of cost sharing. Consequently, Joan's need for timely approval notification, more efficient payment practices, and a simplified method to track contract status is not met.

Recommended Changes

The following changes will result from proposed projects and will assist USDA in meeting Joan's needs in the future:

- Providing implementation standards.
- Streamlining CRP and loan processes, wetlands, or other easements.
- Providing increased information accessibility and remote access to contract status.
- Eliminating manual processes:
  - Passing paper forms back and forth between agencies.
  - Updating hard-copy aerial maps.
- Identifying more accurate contract locations by using consistent land unit information, accurate maps, and portable GPS units.

Analysis of existing geospatial data is crucial to timely approval.

Process changes in the contract preparation and approval process occur in two major areas. First, the manual process of passing paper forms back and forth between agencies will be eliminated. For example, the CRP-1 is passed back and forth between FSA and the COC for review. This is a time-consuming process and does not add value to any services or products provided to the customer. In the future, the CRP-1 and the CRP application will be automated and updated accordingly without being passed back and forth.

The second major improvement is achieved by applying geospatial technology. Numerous process steps will be eliminated, including updating master aerial photo (Process No. 167 shown in **Figure 2.2-9**), CRP applications (Process No. 168), and the 502 and 1026 (Process No. 170). Digital imagery will provide real-time, accurate geospatial information 80 percent faster (Process No. 169) and will be accessible by all agencies simultaneously.

Figure 2.2-9 demonstrates a segment of the CRP process flow that highlights process changes that will result from eliminating the manual process of passing paper forms back and forth between agencies and the manual process of updating hard-copy aerial maps.

Anticipated Benefits

The proposed changes will provide Joan with online status updates, timely payments, informed and timely business decisions, and improved business planning.

Overall, the following specific reductions are estimated by the BPR teams and highlighted in this segment of the process flow.

- 80 percent reduction in the time associated with updating forms and maps after conducting field inspections (Process Nos. 167, 168, 170).
- 50 percent reduction in the time required to prepare the CRP-1 (Process No. 164).

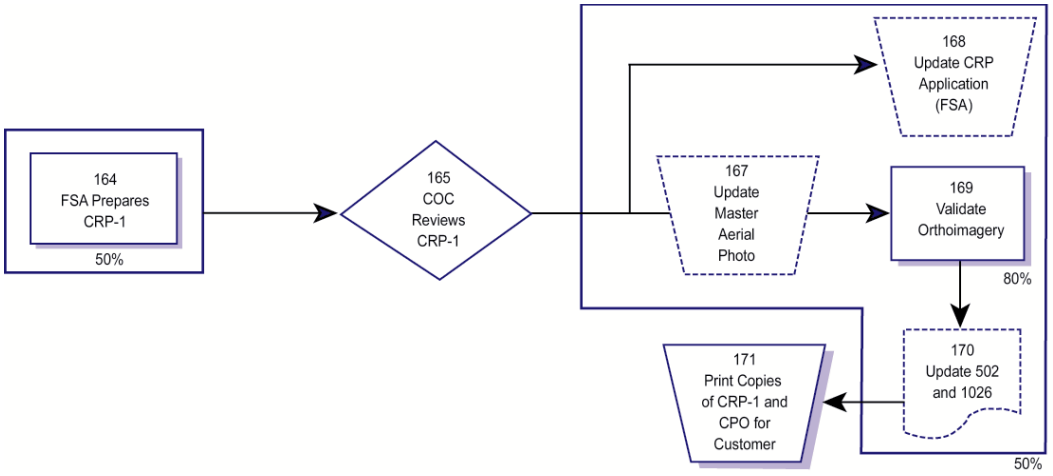


Figure 2.2-9. Contract Preparation/Approval Process Changes

Customer Reacts to Compliance Issues

Current Situation

Joan's interaction with USDA while participating in CRP continues through the monitoring of her land for program compliance. USDA's compliance monitoring is performed annually by either NRCS or FSA. Currently, the process is manual and requires coordination between the two agencies. Joan needs to understand the compliance procedures and actions, be made aware of her appeal rights (if she is not in compliance), and receive timely and accurate notification.

Recommended Changes

Proposed changes include:

- Empowering Service Center employees to provide information to customers by cutting review approval steps.
- Providing employees with the ability to complete transactions while in the field.
- Providing electronic access to information to speed compliance processes.
- Providing implementation standards via a mixture of communication media.

Anticipated Benefits

In the future environment, Joan will get faster responses on her compliance issues and consequently will be able to make improved business decisions.

The major change to the compliance monitoring process will be in NRCS's and FSA's ability to electronically access accurate, complete compliance records. Electronic access in the integrated environment will:

- Reduce by 20 percent the time required for NRCS to conduct status reviews and notify customers of compliance/non-compliance.
- Eliminate the need for NRCS to manually send FSA the LTP-13.
- Reduce by 20 percent the time required for FSA to conduct field inspections and notify customers of appeal rights.

2.2.4.2 Additional Scenarios

The following scenarios illustrate how a revised business model could change customer interaction with USDA Service Centers and staff.

- Before planting, the customer applies for a pesticide permit from the state department of pesticide regulation. In the process, the customer identifies the crops intended for planting in each field where the pesticide will be applied. The land and crop information is recorded on a digital map of the farm that the customer accessed through the Internet. The land and crop information is maintained in a common information database that is shared by the appropriate Federal, state, and local entities that serve this producer. The pesticide application is completed online and e-mailed to the state entity.
- The customer accesses and uses the soil information in the land database to calculate quantities and order seed and fertilizer from a local supplier. The supplier delivers the products to the geospatial coordinates on the maps.
- After planting, the customer applies for crop insurance from a local crop insurance agent. The land and crop information is retrieved and updated by the producer to reflect actual plantings. Much of this information is retrieved from the on-board computer on the customer's tractor. The land database is updated, and the application is submitted online. Insurance policy information and costs are provided to the customer via e-mail.
- The customer uses USDA's online conservation planning application to identify options for developing erosion control terraces. After narrowing the options, the customer requests an onsite visit from a NRCS planner. The Service Center dispatches a staff member with a mobile conservation planning tool that uses the digital maps of the farm from the land database. While onsite, the NRCS employee verifies the crop information provided by the producer. This information is uploaded to the database and made available to the state and the crop insurance agent.
- A major storm causes damage to agricultural land in the country. Using information from meteorological sources, FSA and the insurance agent overlay storm path, wind speed, and rainfall data on the digital maps from the land database and identify customers that may have been affected. The customer files an insurance claim online, and the information is matched with the meteorological data. At the same time, FSA assists in preparing the Governor's request for a Secretarial disaster designation for the area damaged, based on the new information stored in the land database, and notifies the customer that it may be eligible for an emergency loan. A contracted loss adjuster visits the farm and collects information relative to all damage. The information is recorded in the land database. The customer files an application for an emergency loan online; the volume of information needed is limited because information already on file has been pre-populated in the application. The customer's electronic signature is used to accept the terms and conditions of the emergency loan. Service Center staff review the information submitted and issue an electronic payment to the customer's account.
- The customer retrieves market price information from the Internet and contracts a sale to a local elevator online. Transportation for delivering the commodity is also arranged online. Trucks to haul the commodity arrive at the designated coordinates on the digital maps and load the commodity as it is being harvested. Yield information is collected by the customer's on-board computer as the commodity is harvested. The information is transferred to the Service Center, along with a request for a loan deficiency payment. FSA staff

review information on file relative to the producer's eligibility and yield loss from the earlier storm and verify that the quantity is reasonable. FSA makes an electronic payment to the customer's account. Yield information is stored in the land database to support future production history analyses by USDA and crop insurance entities. The information is aggregated for the crop year to support statistical reporting functions.

2.3 Modernization Architecture

An enterprise architecture—Information Systems Technical Architecture (ISTA)—is vital to the successful implementation of this size reengineering effort. The ISTA introduces standards, principles, and transformation processes that an organization should follow—for SCI, that is key to meeting the Model Service Center objective. An architecture shows the relationship between business and technology, and within USDA and the SCI, business drives technology. Technology enables the business to deliver its products and services in new and improved ways. However, SCI recognizes that business and technology have a push-pull relationship—new business needs require new technology and new technology enables new methods of service delivery.

The architectural blueprint, illustrated in **Figure 2.3-1**, is divided into business, applications, data, and technology layers. This model provides a means to communicate architectural information and facilitates a holistic view of the architecture and its segments. Each information system or technology project addresses all layers, providing the methodology for increased integration of projects. It is designed from a business and applications perspective, but built from a technology and data aspect. The Service Center enterprise architecture is the stepping stone to the Model Service Center, mapping out the business drivers and enabling technology to deliver more efficient customer service at reduced cost.

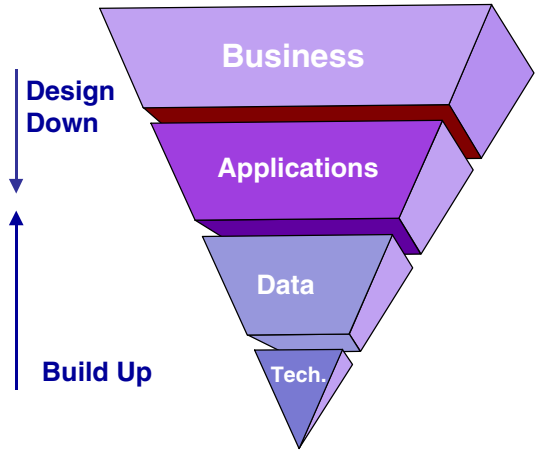


Figure 2.3-1. Enterprise Architecture Blueprint

The blueprint shows the relationship of standards, principles, and transformation processes to effectively guide architecture to the desired future state. These processes ensure that current and proposed architecture and investment initiatives are screened through the layers of the ISTA. SCI will employ transformation processes, such as corporate planning, business opportunity analysis, capital planning and investment control, and baseline architecture characterization inventories, to facilitate evolution of the architecture.

The enterprise architecture provides a description of all USDA customers, business activities, supporting data, and technology. It illustrates the interconnectivity and relationships of the business, applications, data, and technology environments of an enterprise. The blueprint provides a tiered framework for organizing, planning, and building an integrated set of information systems and information technology architectures.

All agencies and offices will be represented in the architecture. In the paragraphs below,

components are grouped as a convenience for discussion, but there are actually many associations among the components and their elements. Together, they describe the SCI's business from mission and direction setting to the most detailed software, data components, and technology.

2.3.1 Business Architecture

This architecture layer represents the overarching vision, goals, and strategies the SCI is using to guide performance of its mission. The mission is described in terms of program delivery functions, core business processes, customers and stakeholders, and the products and services produced.

Included in the business architecture are descriptions of the procedures SCI uses to create, receive, and use the information that is the heart of all business activities. The steps in these procedures are described in terms of the supplier/ producer/customer relationships that govern Service Center operation, from initiation through final delivery to the customer. Associated performance measures of customer satisfaction and operational efficiency provide information to aid performance improvement and GPRA reporting. This architecture layer provides the motives and justification for process improvements and supporting IT acquisitions.

2.3.1.1 Core Business Processes

The business architecture conforms to the overarching vision, goals, and strategies the SCI is using to guide mission performance. The activities inherent in the operation of the integrated Service Center are described in terms of program delivery functions, core business processes, customers and stakeholders, and the products and services produced.

The SCI initially selected an activity-based reengineering methodology because it best supported the conduct of activity-based costing used in the initial economic justification (Service Center Business Case, October 1997). The original enterprise activity model has since been modified to describe more precisely the activities needed for the Service Center of the future to fulfill the vision of "Providing an Integrated USDA" to the consumer. The Service Center operation of the future is described in the activity model in **Figure 2.3-2.**

Under the control of Congress, USDA, EPA requirements, and the normal budgetary limitations, in this model the local communities' wants and needs are combined with the dollars provided by USDA programs, risk insurance, crop management, and conservation practices. The Service Center transforms these inputs into healthy farms and rural communities, and a set of conservation practices that bring farm practices into harmony with the land.

three key mechanisms are critical to operation of the future Service Center. Without the implementation of these enabling technologies, the expected cost savings and customer service improvements will not materialize. Two of these mechanisms, the CCE and LAN/WAN/ Voice, are well on their way to implementation. Common LAN/WAN/Voice standards are in place at almost every Service Center. The initial CCE equipment (desktops and portable workstations) currently is being fielded to Service Centers. Plans are in place to standardize the hardware and software environment to current state-of-the-art technology at every Service Center. BPR results in shared database applications that speed delivery of

services to the customer, reduce the current paperwork burden on the customer, and allow Service Center staff to more efficiently manage their operations. This key linchpin is being developed based on reengineered practices. Without the shared database applications, the savings required by the Clinger-Cohen Act will not materialize.

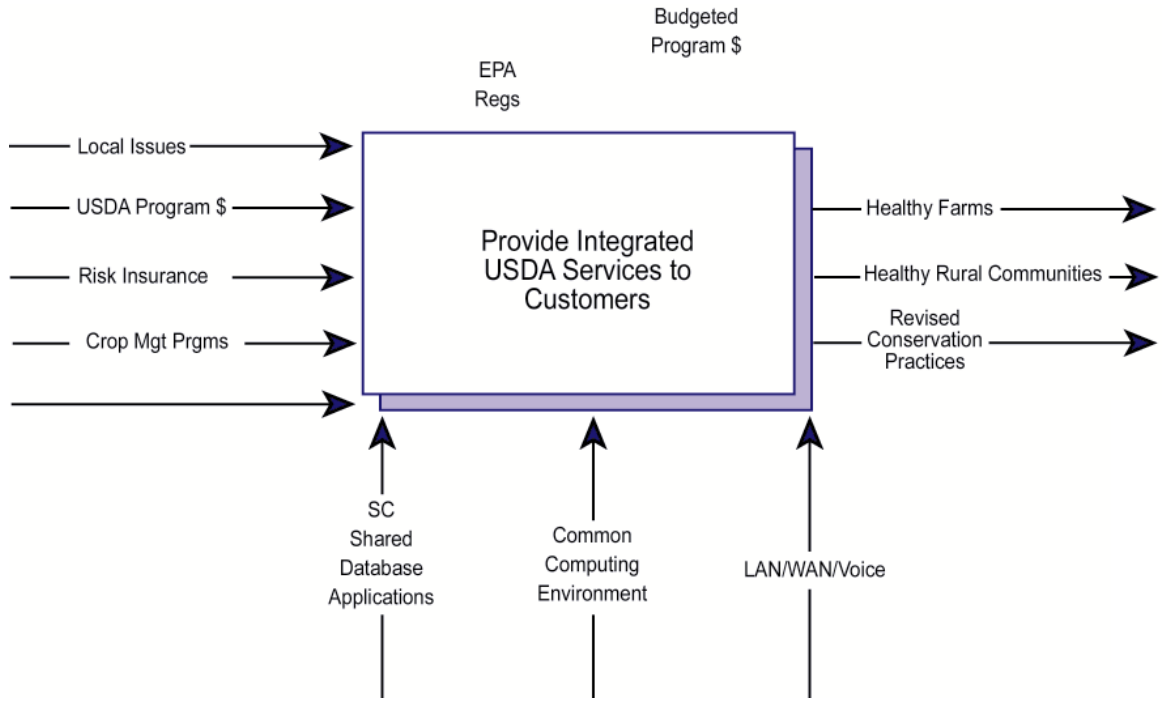


Figure 2.3-2. Service Center Operations of the Future

The core business processes that provide essential services to the customer are:

- Community Development.
- Lending.
- Managing Risk.
- Conservation.

The activity model in **Figure 2.3-3** shows how these four core business processes are linked together to provide a coherent set of services to USDA Service Center customers.

Some core business processes are similar across agencies with respect to supporting activities, competencies, and skill requirements. The Model Service Center therefore relies on consolidation of these core business processes and sharing of supporting activities among existing agencies.

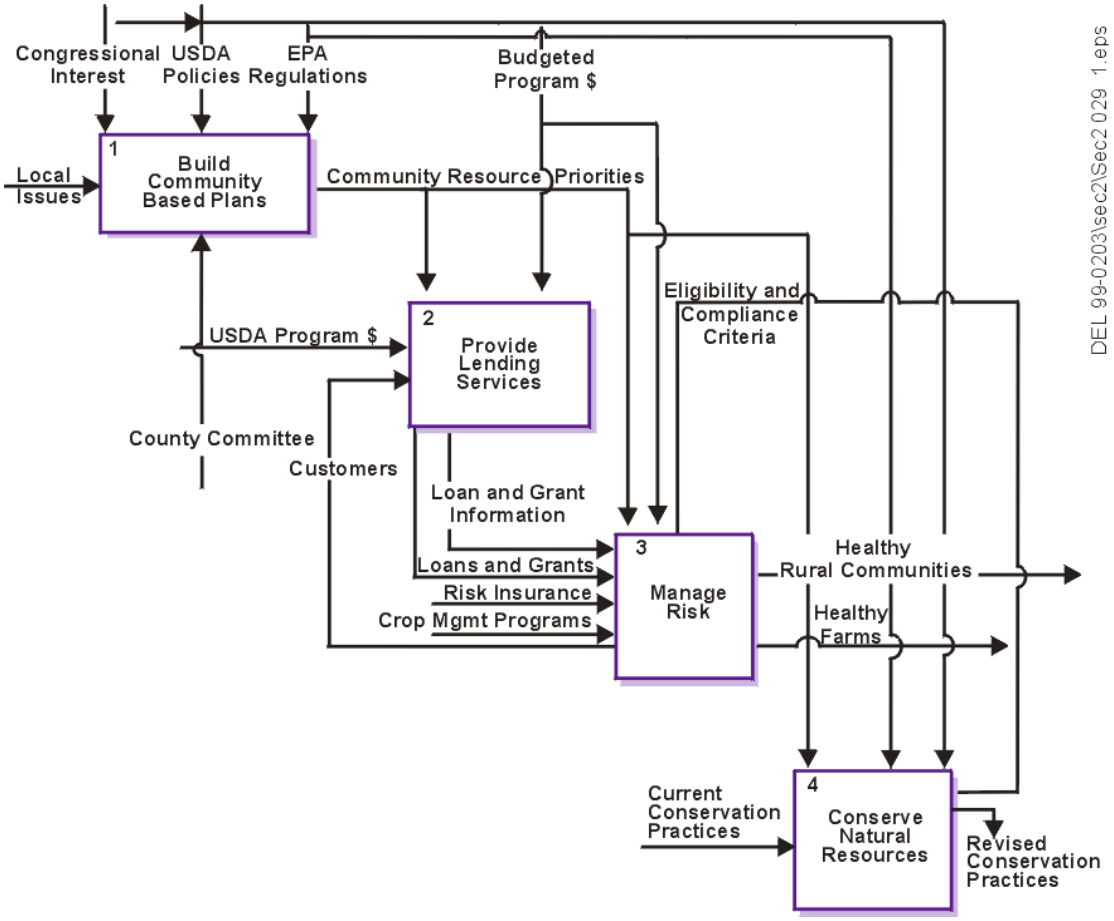


Figure 2.3-3. Providing a Coherent Set of Services

2.3.1.1.1 Community Development

The community development business area transforms local issues into coherent plans that clearly articulate resource priorities for communities, areas, and regions. These community-developed priorities primarily control the structure of assets obtained from USDA and our leveraged partnerships. This business area directly addresses the following CRAT and NCSF objectives and recommendations (summarized in **Section 1.1.1.1** and **Section 1.1.1.2**, respectively):

- ▲ Develop strategic outreach plans.
- ▲ Measure program delivery to minority, women, and small and limited resource farmers.
- ▲ Make all USDA customer communications community-based.
- ▲ Establish satellite or mobile offices in communities where a large population of farm workers reside.

This business area includes the identification of community-based social, economic, and natural resource concerns that can be addressed by Service Centers and partner agencies. These activities may involve multiple landowners, businesses, community groups, and government agencies at all levels. Com-